

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 27, 2020

House Committee on Homeland Security
Chairman Bennie Thompson
U.S. House of Representatives
H2-176 Ford House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

House Oversight and Government Reform Committee
Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney
U.S. House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson and Chairwoman Maloney,

Over the last several weeks, Puerto Rico has been hit by devastating storms and earthquakes that have left mass destruction on the island. Hundreds of powerful aftershocks continue to strike the island, leaving thousands without food, water or shelter. While struggling to recover, a warehouse in Puerto Rico was publicly revealed to be filled with necessary emergency supplies dating back to 2017, after Hurricane Maria. The warehouse contained expired bottles of water, pallets of new diapers, baby formula, portable stoves, propane gas and other vital assistance for disaster victims. While several officials in Puerto Rico have been fired for this incident, questions still remain regarding how and why this happened, exactly who are all of the people responsible for this grave oversight, and whether other warehouses exist like this with unused supplies. Congress must conduct diligent oversight over disaster assistance to get answers to these questions and also ensure this never happens again. That is why I request the House Committee on Homeland Security and House Oversight and Government Reform Committee conduct a thorough investigation into the mismanagement of disaster relief aid that has been received by Puerto Rico since 2017.

Unfortunately, Puerto Rico has a long history of corruption by government officials who have exploited billions of dollars in disaster relief for their own benefit. Last year, there were several arrests of officials in Puerto Rico who were mishandling the money, contractors fraudulently bidding on contracts to fix the damage, and even Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials in charge of overseeing the recovery effort accused of bribery. For example, after Hurricane Maria, the Department of Justice (DOJ) indicted a senior government official and a contractor who oversaw the rebuilding of Puerto Rico's electrical grid on corruption charges.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation continues to investigate multiple officials and contractors for misusing hurricane relief through the National Center for Disaster Fraud.

According to ABC News, Puerto Rico's Governor Wanda Vazquez referred this latest incident of disaster assistance abuse at the warehouse to DOJ to investigate and prosecute the individuals responsible for this crime. Last year, the federal government provided over \$19 billion in federal aid to help rebuild Puerto Rico. With so many residents struggling to obtain basic necessities, it is entirely unacceptable that an entire warehouse of federal aid dating back to 2017 was found like this, especially in light of the most recent earthquakes impacting the island.

I look forward to the announcement and results of your investigation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lee M. Zeldin". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first name "Lee" being the most prominent.

Lee Zeldin
Member of Congress